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Ukraine 'to stake UK gold claim for £16,000bn'

THE INDEPENDENT
GOLD FEVER has struck some members of the Ukrainian parliament who are considering making a claim on Britain for the return of gold said to have been lodged with the Bank of England about 270 years ago.

Roman Ivanychuk, the MP who reminded parliament of the gold legend, said that, with interest, the sum due to the Ukraine would be £16,000bn. Investigators in Lvov were working on the case, he said.

In reply to a question in parliament late on Friday, Volodymyr Yavorivsky, one of the 25 candidates for this week's Ukrainian presidential elections, had said he would

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From Susan Viets in Kiev

move to claim the treasure if elected. Bogdan Horyn, deputy chairman of the Ukrainian parliament's foreign affairs committee, said yesterday that "no official claim has been made for the funds".

It is said that Colonel Pavel Polubotok, the pro-independence Ukrainian military leader, deposited a barrel of gold with the Bank of England as a precaution before he went to St Petersburg for negotiations with Tsar Peter the Great. Col Polubotok, who

died in prison, allegedly bequeathed 3 per cent of the gold to his heirs and the rest to citizens of a free Ukraine.

Since then, pro-independence Ukrainians have had visions of astronomical wealth. The claim was raised unsuccessfully in the late nineteenth century when the Ukraine was still tethered to Russia. The former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, Ukrainian-born, is also rumoured to have tried to get it returned.

Now that the Ukraine has issued a sovereignty declaration, some MPs hope the case is stronger.

Mr Ivanychuk is surprised at the prominence his comments have received in the Soviet news. He regrets raising the issue: "This could be an international scandal, because we have no documents so far. All my information comes from *Ridna Nyva*, a Canadian emigré Ukrainian magazine."

A Bank of England spokesman said: "So far as we can tell, we haven't been approached by the Ukrainians." The figure of £16,000bn "looks a bit fanciful", he said, but the bank would not know if there was anything to the claim "until we start digging in our records".

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